United Nations

Daily Highlights

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THURSDAY HIGHLIGHTS

- Security Council decides to lift sanctions against Haiti following return of President Aristide; Brazil and Russian Federation abstain from voting on resolution.

- Foreign Ministers of five permanent Security Council members note growing United Nations role in world affairs; commend Secretary-General for outstanding contribution to work of Organization.

- Israel says peace treaty with Syria could crown comprehensive Middle East settlement; Moldova, Suriname, Canada, Morocco and Panama also speak in General Assembly general debate today.

- Croatia says aimless manoeuvring by international community could lead to even worse conflict in former Yugoslavia; Armenia, Nigeria, Ireland, Slovak Republic, Estonia, Bolivia, The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Seychelles and Qatar among other speakers in general debate yesterday.

- WFP says intense fighting in Liberia has left hundreds of thousands of people beyond reach of humanitarian aid.

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The Security Council this evening decided to lift economic sanctions against Haiti the day after the return of exiled President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. The Council took that action, under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter, by adopting resolution 944 (1994). There were 13 votes in favour, none against, and two abstentions (Brazil and Russian Federation).

The Council also met this morning to consider the first report of the multinational force in Haiti. United States Secretary of State Warren Christopher told that meeting that the lifting of sanctions, together with new aid and the cooperation of international financial institutions, would help put Haiti on the road to economic recovery. Some 16,000 peace-keepers from a coalition of nations were now on the ground in Haiti enforcing civil order and facilitating the return of President Aristide and of the United Nations

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Mission in Haiti (UNMIH). Many of those forces would remain there to ensure a seamless transition of authority from the multinational force to the United Nations Mission.

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The Foreign Ministers of the five permanent members of the Security Council today expressed the view that the international community was still faced with serious challenges despite positive developments in some areas in the past year. Maintaining international peace and security and promoting development remained major tasks. The Ministers of China, France, Russian Federation, United Kingdom and the United States made those observations in a statement issued after a luncheon with Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali.

The Foreign Ministers noted that the role of the United Nations in world affairs had been strengthened in recent years, and that the Organization had vital contributions to make in the political and economic fields. They commended the Secretary-General for his outstanding contribution to enhancing the work of the United Nations, and promoting the purposes and principles of the Charter.

The Ministers also expressed their appreciation for the efforts of the United Nations in maintaining world peace and security, as well as in preventing and resolving regional conflicts and disputes. The statement touched on the situations in Rwanda, the former Yugoslavia and Haiti. It also addressed the Organization's grave financial problems, and its role in ensuring full compliance with international humanitarian law.

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Shimon Peres, Israel's Minister for Foreign Affairs, said some remarkable events had occurred in the last year: the Palestinian people had gained authority in Gaza and Jericho; Jordan and Israel had agreed to end the state of war and move towards a full peace agreement; voices of promise were being exchanged between Damascus and Jerusalem; and Morocco and Israel had established formal relations. An agenda for a new Middle East would emerge from an unprecedented economic conference in Casablanca next month. Meanwhile, the United Nations could introduce necessary economic and social institutions in Gaza. An enlarged allocation for Gaza would produce immediate results and could make it a model of United Nations endeavours.

Israel was committed to ending conflicts and removing their causes, he continued. It intended to fully implement the Declaration of Principles and to support Palestinian elections. Israel would also continue talks with Syria. A peace treaty between the two countries could produce historic results and crown a comprehensive peace. All countries in the Middle East faced a choice -- to remain politically divided and economically stagnant, or to become economically advanced and politically just. The Middle East needed stability and free trade, and could form a common market starting with a

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community of water and tourism. The $70 billion spent each year on arms could be directed to development. But the arms race could be reduced only by regional consent -- no country could do it alone.

The President of Moldova, Mircea Ion Snegur, told the General Assembly today that progress in the newly independent States had been followed by the reappearance of some problems connected to national minorities, the presence of foreign military troops and the intensification of separatist tendencies -- often inspired from abroad. The United Nations could not remain indifferent to the difficulties of States in transition. It should provide assistance taking into consideration the conditions in each State. Moldova's experience was different from that of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, where communism had functioned for only four decades. It had to start the process of democratization and economic transition almost from the beginning.

It was unfortunate that separatist tendencies still existed in eastern regions, he continued. The members of the "Ilascu Group" continued to be illegally detained, in spite of international concern, and Moldovans from the left bank of the Dneister river were being denied the right to use Latin writing in schools. The separatist leaders from Tiraspol continued to obstruct the signing of the already endorsed agreement on the legal status and withdrawal of the 14th Army. The complete withdrawal of foreign military troops from Moldovan territory was the will of the people. The authorities of the Russian Federation had displayed a correct understanding of the position of Moldova.

President Runaldo Ronald Venetiaan of Suriname today said efforts were under way to put a democratic system back on track in his country. In Suriname, and elsewhere in Latin America, bold but necessary reforms had been set in motion to eliminate obstacles to development and economic competitiveness. The development of human resources was a priority. Living conditions and basic health and nutrition must be improved. The austerity measures subscribed to had not been easy to implement because of the weak economy and the hardships they imposed. Such an undertaking needed vast resources which could not be mobilized at the national level alone. He called on the international community for assistance to complement Suriname's efforts to create prosperity.

United Nations programmes for Suriname had been hampered by the application of one of the main criteria for assistance, he said. Suriname had been rated as a net contributor to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) because its per capita income was calculated to be higher than $3,000. That figure was wrong, as an unrealistic official exchange rate had been applied. Now that the official exchange rate had moved to a realistic level -- more than 100 times the former rate -- Suriname was looking forward to a readjustment of its status and a reclassification, as well as to the aid programmes that would follow.

Canada's Foreign Minister, André Ouellet, said his country had always had a special place for the United Nations in its foreign policy. The international community needed a strong, credible multilateral institution

equipped with the tools to fulfil its expectations. There was no more urgent task than reform of the United Nations. Despite problems in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Somalia and Rwanda, the Security Council was on the right track, although the steps it had taken had not always proved successful. The economic and social problems facing the international community often received less media attention than the armed conflicts, but were just as urgent

United Nations intervention often came too late, or too slow, or was carried out under inadequate conditions, he continued. The lack of political will on the part of the Member States could not be blamed on the Secretary-General. The Organization had done more and better than could be expected of an institution with the most elementary resources, lacking even a solid financial foundation. However, too much energy was expended in activities of marginal use and in unimportant quarrels. Valuable resources were wasted by allowing various institutions and agencies to jealously protect their independence and resist changes, when circumstances required a pooling of energies.

Morocco's Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, Abdellatif Filali, told the General Assembly today that the arms race had been replaced by an economic race. The new race was characterized by the strengthening of relations within new economic blocs, and led to a widening gap between developed and developing countries. He noted that Morocco would host an economic conference for the Middle East and North Africa in Casablanca next month. Senior political officials from many countries had been invited, as well as businessmen and economics experts. The conference would set rules to boost the economies of the two regions, and create economic programmes based on partnership for the benefit of countries and peoples.

After the Second World War, he went on to say, international relations had been characterized by the end of colonialism. However, some enclaves in northern Morocco remained under Spanish authority. Morocco had tirelessly requested the return of those enclaves so that it could achieve territorial integrity. The proposal by the King of Morocco for the creation of a Moroccan-Spanish group to study the question was the best framework to achieve a settlement. Regarding the "so-called question of Western Sahara", the Settlement Plan had entered its final phase. Morocco was cooperating with the Secretary-General to speed up the process of implementation, and was optimistic that a referendum would be held in the coming months.

The Minister for Foreign Affairs of Panama, Gabriel Lewis Galindo, said the results of the May election had allowed his country to reconstruct a democratic structure. Panama could form new relations with the United States leading to timely completion of an agreement, based on the Tratados Tarrijos-Charter, regarding the Panama Canal. The Government proposed to implement the timetable for the reversion to Panama of the waterways and surrounding areas, and would seek demilitarization there. Panama would work to attract investment in the Canal area. In 1997, a convention would bring together users and potential users to discuss a Panama Canal development project, as well as the overall development of the country. Panama would plan that convention with the United Nations, France and the United States.

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Panama had recently rejoined the Rio Group as a full member, and was pursuing a process of integration with the Central American countries, he noted. Trading opportunities based on the reversion of the Panama Canal demanded the strengthening of relations with the Caribbean Basin. Panama would also seek participation in the North American Free Trade Agreement. Panama had offered parts of its territory to provide a temporary solution to the problem of Haitian and Cuban refugees. Haiti's problems would be resolved only when all relevant Security Council resolutions were implemented and when the causes of poverty and backwardness were addressed.

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Croatia's President, Franjo Tudjman, yesterday stressed the need for an international order capable of defending the rights of all States, especially young and small ones. A mechanism for diplomatic-political negotiations and for confidence-building was a priority. In cases where political efforts were futile, the United Nations must have more efficient mechanisms to achieve and even impose solutions. The Organization should be entitled, in crises, to encroach upon the internal affairs of States on behalf of the global community. Peacemaking must evolve from a static freezing of conflicts, and curbing of expansion, to mechanisms for the prevention of crises.

Croatia had cooperated in the search for a peaceful political resolution of the conflict in the former Yugoslavia believing that the principles of international law would prevail, he said. However, it could not endlessly compromise. The aimless manoeuvering of the international community threatened to push Croatia into a new conflict even worse than the previous one. The crises in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina were both caused by Serbian aggression. For that reason, a package solution should be sought. Belgrade and the Bosnian Serbs should be made to stop supporting the Croatian Serbs. The lifting of sanctions against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro) must be linked to the cessation of the occupation of Croatian areas. The mandate of the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) must be redefined to allow for the implementation of Security Council resolutions.

The President of Armenia, Levon Ter-Petrossian, told the General Assembly yesterday that his country's economy had been strained by the changes following the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the transition to a market economy. The economy was further crippled by over-reliance on trade with the former Soviet republics, the blockade of transportation routes by neighbouring Azerbaijan, an embargo by Turkey and the damage inflicted by the disastrous earthquake in 1988. Despite the difficulties, the Armenian Government had begun implementing significant structural reforms to create a healthy market economy.

Armenia considered self-determination to be an inalienable human right, he said. With regard to Nagorny Karabakh, Armenia had no territorial claims against Azerbaijan. The conflict was between the people of Nagorny Karabakh, who were striving for self-determination, and the Government of Azerbaijan, which was refusing to address their rights. Armenia provided "moral,

diplomatic and humanitarian assistance" to the people of Nagorny Karabakh. Both Armenia and Nagorny Karabakh had repeatedly expressed their readiness to comply with Security Council resolutions.

Nigerian Foreign Minister Baba Gana Kingibe said peace and security were inextricably linked to development. It was vital, therefore, that the countries of the North and South should see cooperation in development in terms of mutual interest and partnership. The international community should initiate bold and imaginative measures to bridge the widening gap between the rich and poor nations. The response of the international community to the ongoing problems of Africa -- which centred around the debt crisis, declining investment and commodity prices, and capital flight -- had been feeble and inadequate. It was imperative that Africa be given a fresh start to effectively address its problems.

Nigeria, like many other African countries, had come to grips with "certain realities, the ramifications of which are usually misconstrued and need to be fully understood", he continued. Nigeria had tried to evolve appropriate democratic institutions and values arising from and responding to its national experiences, circumstances and aspirations. In Nigeria and other parts of Africa, the process of democratization had often not been correctly presented. Recent advances in information technology and Africa's lack of capacity for information delivery had hampered its ability to objectively project developments occurring in its societies.

Dick Spring, Ireland's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, said the past 12 months had significantly enhanced the prospects for peace and stability on the island of Ireland. While the edifice of a solution remained to be constructed, solid foundations had been laid. The origin of the Northern Irish conflict lay in a difference of view as to whether the partition of Ireland was, or was not, a denial of the Irish people's right to self-determination. The Joint Declaration by the Irish and British Governments aimed to deal with the issue of self-determination in a way which banished the spectre of coercion. A crucial aspect was the acknowledgement that future arrangements in Ireland would be decided by and agreed to by the Irish people themselves, north and south.

He said there was a profound lack of consensus on the constitutional issue of whether the legitimate frame of reference was Northern Ireland or the island as a whole. He proposed that new structures be set in place between the north and south. It should be agreed that the exercise of sovereignty, by whichever Government, would at all times be qualified by scrupulously equal treatment of the two northern communities. Under new arrangements, guaranteed by formal agreement between the two Governments, the conflict over the choice of sovereignty might cease to become a destabilizing issue.

Eduard Kukan, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic, said that joining the European Union and active participation in the structures of European security were among the main priorities of Slovak foreign policy. The Slovak Republic strived to maintain and develop good relations and cooperation with other countries, and those countries could count on it as a

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reliable partner. Noting that his country had a contingent of 600 soldiers in the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR), he welcomed the decision to establish stand-by peace-keeping forces. Those forces needed specialized preparation, and Slovakia was establishing a training centre which had already been used to prepare more than 1,200 peace-keepers.

The Slovak Republic was concentrating its efforts on the transformation of ownership relations, he continued. International cooperation and assistance were the prerequisites for further development of economies in transition. As one of the youngest Members of the United Nations, the Slovak Republic intended not only to benefit from the Organization's programmes, but also to be actively involved in them. It was ready to offer assistance, within its means and capabilities, especially through the participation of Slovak experts in development programmes.

Estonia's Acting Minister for Foreign Affairs, Juri Luik, yesterday requested a moment of silence in memory of the hundreds of victims of the sinking of an Estonian passenger ferry in the Baltic Sea. He commended the cooperative efforts of the Swedish, Finnish, Danish and Estonian rescue units, adding that there had been offers of help from the Russian Federation, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and others.

The withdrawal of troops from Estonia had brought it much closer to normalization of relations with the Russian Federation, he said. However, the problem of Baltic security had not yet been solved. Citing concern over talk of new spheres of influence, he said a viable security framework based on shared values, and including central and eastern European States, was nearly in place. In lending its name to any peace-keeping operation, the United Nations must stand by the fundamental principles of neutrality and multilateralism. The Organization should never become a mask behind which one country tried to assert dominance over another by means of peace-keeping. He went on to say that Germany and Japan should have permanent membership in the Security Council.

Antonio Aranibar Quiroga, Bolivia's Minister for Foreign Affairs and Worship, said his country had reformed its political constitution and was seeking to consolidate democracy and economic development with social justice. Bolivia had embarked on a policy of popular participation, of reform of the educational system, and of capitalization of public enterprises. It planned to apply new legal provisions to increase investment and production, provide more and better job opportunities, and produce concrete solutions to the problems of poverty and marginalization. Bolivia had also proposed to host a meeting of the presidents of the hemisphere in 1996 to examine the issues of sustainable development.

He expressed confidence that observance of the International Decade for Indigenous Peoples would be practical and concrete in its scope and goals. At a meeting in Bolivia last June, representatives of Latin American Governments, grass-roots peasant organizations and international agencies framed a series of recommendations to be included in the strategy of the Decade. He hoped for a prompt and positive response, so that the legitimate claims of indigenous

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peoples "would not get lost in the labyrinths of bureaucracy or the oblivion of another 500 years of solitude".

Stevo Crvenkovski, Minister for Foreign Affairs of The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, expressed concern that the Declaration of the Vienna Conference on Human Rights was not being implemented as expected. The world was still faced with massive violations of human rights, as in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Rwanda. Meanwhile, insecurity in the south of the Balkans was growing. The "Republic of Macedonia" was exposed to classic economic aggression through the unilateral embargo introduced by Greece in February. Developments in Greek-Albanian and Greek-Turkish relations had also given rise to serious tensions. The Security Council should give that situation due attention.

A way out of the situation in the Balkans would be found only by implementing the principles of the new European model of open borders, integration and cooperation, he stressed. The worst threat to the region was the emergence of new divisions and regroupings along religious and ethnic lines. The Balkans could not remain a relic of the block divisions in Europe and the world, as that could become an open threat to peace and stability. That threat could be avoided through preventive action by the international community in the form of monitoring missions and concrete policies.

Danielle de St. Jorre, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Planning and Environment of the Seychelles, said the vulnerable situation of small island States was a microcosm of the future of mankind. The recent Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island States had focused attention on that situation. For many, it was a source of great hope, but some small island States remained sceptical. She expressed hope that the Conference represented a change of attitude on the part of the industrialized countries, for it was those countries that would implement the plans of actions that produced change and development.

Two years after the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), its plan of action -- "Agenda 21" -- had only been partly implemented, she continued. Harmonizing development policies and measures with protection of the environment necessitated the definition of budgetary priorities. That should not be done in a spirit of giving hand-outs or with evaluations based only on per capita income. A global approach to environmental issues was needed. Concrete measures should also be taken with regard to the role of women in the development process. Conduct and practices should be modified in real terms to enhance the role of women.

Qatar's Foreign Minister, Hamad Bin Jassem Bin Jabr Al-Thani, said all nations must be represented equally in the United Nations. His country supported reforms that gave each nation a voice in decision-making on the many social issues to be faced. There must be a balance between the General Assembly as the political body of the United Nations, the Security Council as the body responsible for international peace and security, and the Economic

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and Social Council as the body responsible for social and economic issues. The General Assembly must be given a greater role. No one State should have hegemony in the Organization.

Qatar had always participated in solving regional problems, he continued. It supported the resolution of the dispute over the three islands between Libya and the United Arab Emirates by diplomatic means. Qatar had stood on the side of legitimacy and unity in the dispute in Yemen. Iraq must implement all Security Council resolution, including the recognition of the sovereignty of Kuwait. He supported the legislation in the United States Congress on lifting the arms embargo against the Bosnian Government. The Security Council should declare the entire country of Bosnia and Herzegovina a safe haven.

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Intense fighting in Liberia has placed hundreds of thousands of people beyond the reach of humanitarian assistance, according to the World Food Programme (WFP). Aid workers have been withdrawn from the interior and relief is only being provided in greater Monrovia and other areas secured by the Economic Community of West African States' Monitoring Observer Group (ECOMOG). All other areas are inaccessible following an upsurge in attacks on United Nations convoys and personnel.

In the past few weeks, dozens of national employees assisting with relief efforts have gone missing, including the drivers of four WFP trucks together with the vehicles. With vast areas declared "no-go" zones and general chaos in the interior, it is difficult to see how the Akosombo peace accords signed on 12 September by the three main warring factions will be implemented, the WFP said.

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